

On Some Archæological Remains in Bishnath.—By W. N. EDWARDS.

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BISHNATH, or Visvanatha, as it was originally called, is one of the most interesting towns in the Assam Valley on account of its archæological remains and sacred Hindu traditions. At one time it was a large and populous town, as can be seen by the immense earthworks that surround the place, and in the 13th century it was in close communication with PRATAPPUR, the capital of *Arimutta* Raja who appears to have ruled over the tract of country lying between Visvanatha on the east to the Subonsiri River on the west¹ about that time. There are still a large number of tanks on the Bishnath plain and in Behali and Gomiri mouzas that are ascribed to him. Another interesting discovery lately made is that the large earthen "bund" known now as the Majulighur, which runs almost straight from the old city Pratappur, to the low hills in the Duffla Range, a distance of about 12 miles, is nothing more or less than a fortification evidently thrown up as a protection against the people of the west. Deep in the heart of the forest where the "ghur" has been less disturbed, on the west, is a deep ditch running parallel to the "bund" for the whole of its length, and from the ditch the "ghur" rises very abruptly with a parapet on the western edge, and falling to the east in a gentle slope; furthermore, at intervals of about 80 yards there are bastions thrown out on the west face which command the rampart both to the north and south. There seems now little doubt from these facts that there being no natural boundary to the west of the kingdom as there was on the east (the Subonsiri) the fortification was made as a protection against aggression.

The Brahmins say that before Visvanath was built the place was called *Viswagiri Porbot*, and the present town and the island known as Oomatoomoni were joined in one large hill, which sunk under a severe volcanic disturbance leaving the place in its present form. It was renowned from time immemorial as the spot where Visnu lopped off the upper arm and chest of the dead body of Sati which Siva in his grief was carrying about, and the spots on which these portions of Sati's body fell are held sacred to this day. There are now the following

¹ This information is derived from an old Buranji in the possession of Srijut Rajoni Kanta Burdolai of N. Lackimpur.

temples in Bishnath :—Visvanath, Uma Dewal, Chandi Dewal, Sibanath Dewal, Komoleswar Dewal Basdeo Dewal and the Bordhol Dewal. Of these, there are now only two *mandirs* actually standing, and both are fine specimens of the architecture of the Ahoom kings, but both are abandoned as far as worship is concerned, the Thakurs having built small *cutcha* houses near them where “Puja” is carried on.

The Bor Dhol mandir, the larger of these, was built by the order of Gaurinātha Siṃha who reigned from 1780 to 1795, while the smaller one called “Sibanath Dewal” was built some 50 to 60 years previously in the reign of Sibasing. This is a somewhat smaller structure, and of less handsome design, and was constructed from the materials taken from the old temple of Visvanatha; which was dismantled owing to the depredations of the Brahmaputra river.

The Visvanath temple was built by Godādhara Siṃha or, as he was known to the Ahooms, “Chupatpha.” There is a copper plate still in existence which sets forth that in the year A.D. 1685 Godādhara Siṃha granted for the upkeep of the temple :—“Certain ornaments, four Brahmans, 40 Sudra Paiks, eight dancing girls, and also 20 puras of Brahmattar Land.” There is also a second “*Phuli*” granting 24 Puras of Devottar Land and servants to the same temple dated 1815 A.D. This was in Chandrakant’s reign.

The temple, however, has long since disappeared and the Linga is now only exposed for six months in the year when the river falls; for the rest of the time it is buried by the water.

Of the remaining temples, that of “Caṇḍī” and “Umā” are the most important. The former is a square brick building, built on the rocks, at the edge of which, the new channel of the Brahmaputra flows. This was built from public subscriptions, some 60 years ago, by a religious mendicant named Brahma Chari Fakir, and covers the spot where Sati’s chest fell. To the right of the temple there is a *Linga* carved out of the rock. The out-buildings attached to this temple have fallen into decay, though the temple itself commands worshippers. It is evident that the rents received by the owners of these temples from the Bramatta and Devottor lands are no longer utilized for the purpose for which they were intended. The last temple of importance is that of “Umāmāī” which is situated on the Island, and the Brāhmin ministering there shows one the spot where Sati’s arm fell. Here there is no brick building; merely a shed roofed with corrugated iron, built over the sacred rock. Close to this shrine is a rock on which the following inscription has been deciphered :—

“Written by Holodhar, son of Laksimidhar Sarmah, Commander of the army of the king of Pratappur.” There is no date. There are

other inscriptions on the rocks on the island, but they have not been deciphered.

Buroi Fortification.—This is a most interesting ruin situated at the foot of the Duffla hills, where the Buroi river debouches into the plain; and was found by the writer some few years ago. The fortification consists of two stone walls, one on each side of the river—and it is assigned to the Pretappuria Raja who, the Dufflas say, entrenched himself in the hills with a considerable following. The stones bear distinct builders' marks on them, similar to those found by Capt. Hannay on the Copper temple of the *Sutias* beyond Sudiya, some 70 years ago. Hence we may suppose that the *Sutias* are responsible for these walls also. A detailed account of these ruins is given by the writer in a paper to the A. Soc. of Bengal. They appear to date back as far as the 13th Century.

Behali Mandir.—The remains of another small temple I was fortunate enough to discover in 1892, situated at the edge of an old tank in the Behali garden. All that remained was the plinth which was some 18" to 2' below the surface of the ground. The building had evidently been a small one, not more than 12' × 12', but was exceedingly well built with brick—the base had a projecting plinth with decorative mouldings; while the foundation of the structure, which was some 5' below the plinth, rose from a small base gradually widening on all sides until it acquired the area of the plinth—a curious and uncommon method of building, which I think is never seen now-a-days.

Pertabghur.—This is the site of the ancient city of Pretappur which, in the middle ages, had acquired renown as “the Splendid City” the capital of the Pratappuria Raja. Captain Westmacott, in an article to the A. Soc. of Bengal, written in 1835, imagines that the city was situated on the present site of Tezpur, for he says:—

“In the M.S. of the Assam Kings the city is stated to have been placed on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra, *a little below Bishnath*,¹ and as the entire country bordering the river from Pora (Tezpur) eastward to Bishnath * * * is covered with swamp to the extent of several miles inland, there are strong grounds for supposing that “Pretappur’ and ‘Pora’ are the same.”

From the present configuration of the country there is now no doubt that the Brahmaputra at one time flowed at the foot of Pertabghur, as there is a drop of some 30 feet from the red deluvial lands of that part to the low alluvial swamps that Captain Westmacott describes. And this being the case, Pretappur *would* be “a little below

¹ The italics are mine.

Bishnath," the distance round the curve of the high land being only some six miles between the two places.

The large earthworks that surround the old city are extant to this day and measure roughly 2 miles $1\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs long, by 1 mile 2 furlongs broad, and comprise all that land lying between the Ghiladari river on the west, to the Sadharu river on the east. These entrenchments consist of double "Bunds" about 60 feet apart from the apex, with a deep ditch between, which was probably kept full of water from the rivers. Almost in the centre of this enclosure, of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ square miles, is a large fort consisting of exceedingly high earthen walls, which were at one time lined with brick; and surrounded by further outworks thrown up 50 to 60 yards away from the main fort, and protected by a ditch all round. It would appear that this was the citadel of the town. There are also several large tanks full of water to this day scattered throughout the enclosure. To the N.E. of the citadel is a clump of trees by the side of a tank, known to the natives as the "Burra-Gosai Jharoni," and here the Assamese worship once or twice a year coming from all parts of the district. On examination, I found a walled enclosure 100 feet square, but now almost hidden under earth and jungle, laid with old Assamese bricks; and scattered about inside this a good deal of carved stone work. One slab had some inscription on it, but this has yet to be deciphered. There was also a curious granite vase standing about 2 feet high and solid, but for a circular hole running from mouth to base 2 inches in diameter. It was unbroken, and had evidently been used for ornamentation. By native tradition this spot is said to have been the tomb of a holy man of a bygone age, and there is a *murti* attached to the place, of old Hindu design, which the Thakur keeps hidden, until required at the festivals.

From these interesting remains it seems that Pretappur was a large and populous city about the 13th century, but its actual age was probably considerably greater than this, for the capital of Nagsonkor, A.D. 378, was situated in or about this place.